



News Release

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CPS RELEASES BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS IN KEEPING KIDS SAFE, STRENGTHENING ARIZONA'S FAMILIES

PHOENIX – (September 16, 2005) Child Protective Services officials today released a blueprint for keeping kids safe that builds on more than two years of reforms and focuses on engaging and supporting all types of families – biological, extended, foster and adoptive.

"We are so excited to share with stakeholders and communities a plan for keeping kids safe that makes us all partners in strengthening Arizona's families," said David Berns, Director of the Arizona Department of Economic Security, which includes CPS. "Traditionally in Arizona, our only recourse for keeping children safe has been to remove them from their homes."

Nearly 10,000 children are currently in the state's care after being removed from their homes as the result of abuse or neglect. CPS believes many of those children could have remained safely in their homes had there been resources, systems and strategies in place for earlier intervention and to better support the family.

If the children have already been removed from the home, having staff and programs that engage all the adults in their lives – their families, relatives and foster caregivers – and providing a continuum of services based on their strengths and needs also could help children return home sooner or, if they cannot be reunified with their families, could help them find permanent homes more quickly.

Strengthening Families: A Blueprint for Re-aligning Arizona's Child Welfare System describes how this will be done. It focuses on engaging and supporting families, building on their abilities and providing services to parents and children in the home. It highlights steps that already have been taken and outlines others that are still being developed.

Governor Janet Napolitano, who has spearheaded efforts to keep children safe since taking office in January 2003, lauded the strategies in the *Blueprint* as critical next steps in child protection.

"Great progress has been made at the front end of the system, with more case managers hired, better tools in place to assess child safety and increased collaboration with behavioral health, law enforcement and other community partners," Napolitano said. "But, if we're really going to turn things around, we need to do a better job of preventing abuse or intervening before precarious family situations escalate."

(more)

The strategies outlined in the *Blueprint* go a long way toward doing just that, said Tracy Wareing, Acting Deputy Director for the Division of Children, Youth and Families.

"The *Blueprint* includes nationally recognized strategies tailored to meet the unique needs and characteristics of Arizona's families," Wareing said. "When these strategies go beyond the implementation phase and become the standard practice across the state, we will have a child welfare system that truly engages the entire community in keeping kids safe."

Carol Kamin, President and Chief Executive Officer of Children's Action Alliance – a statewide advocacy organization – said it's time for Arizona to move forward with efforts like those outlined in the *Blueprint*.

"Too often, people debate between family preservation and child safety," Kamin said. "They don't realize that those concepts truly complement each other."

"When you have a system that strengthens families, the families are better able to provide safe, nurturing homes for their children. If that's not possible, you need to provide support to the relatives and foster or adoptive families who step in and give that child the home and love he needs to feel safe," Kamin said. "And, in the end, isn't that what we all want?"

The *Blueprint* outlines ambitious goals and objectives for the entire system that include reducing the number of children in foster care by 5% and virtually eliminating the use of group homes and shelters to house very young children by next year. Officials acknowledge that some of the action steps taken and strategies being developed to achieve those goals represent a drastic change in the way the agency does business.

"Change can be difficult, but we look at this as an opportunity," Berns said. "This is an opportunity for every stakeholder in the system – families, staff members and service providers – to use their collective wisdom, experience and commitment and re-think their role in efforts to keep children safe."

Copies of Strengthening Families: A Blueprint for Realigning Arizona's Child Welfare System are available online at: <http://www.azdes.gov/dcyf/cps/>